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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION (01/23): MITCHELL AS  
SPECIAL ENVOY DRAWS POSITIVE COVERAGE

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Main Stories:  
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The appointment of George Mitchell as Special Envoy For Middle East Peace received highlighted coverage in the Palestinian press. The lead stories in both Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida speculated on the meaning of the appointment to the future of the peace process. Al-Ayyam's main headline reads, "Obama to deploy Mitchell to the region soon, emphasizes commitment to the two-state solution." The paper introduces the story with a close-up photo of President Obama standing next to Mitchell. Similarly, Al-Hayat Al-Jadida combines coverage on Mitchell's appointment with the "pressing situation in Gaza," declaring, "Obama calls for opening the Gaza crossings, and will send Mitchell to the region soon as Middle East envoy."

The largest circulating daily, Al-Quds, carried a front-page feature by its Washington-based correspondent under the headline, "Will the new Middle East Envoy Mitchell pick up from where the 'Mitchell Report' ended?" The article leads with an upbeat paragraph stating that the appointment of Mitchell indicates the American administration's strong intent to, "get involved [regionally] in an effective manner," to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict. The article takes note of the former Senator's success in brokering a peace agreement in Northern Ireland and his draft of the "Mitchell Report" on the Middle East in April 2001, which included recommendations that Israel stop its settlement activities and remove its checkpoints in the West Bank.

In separate front-page coverage, the dailies quoted remarks made by a Hamas' member in Lebanon, Osama Hamdan, regarding Mitchell's appointment. According to Hamdan, "some" Palestinians were optimistic over Mitchell's appointment as Middle East envoy. However, given Obama's unwillingness to deal directly with Hamas, "it seems that, even before appointing [Mitchell] officially,

[Obama] has tried to put a stick in the spokes of the wheel, perhaps to ensure that (Mitchell) does not succeed."

Palestinian online news agencies highlighted coverage of Mitchell's appointment. The lead story on the largest Palestinian news website, Ma'an News Agency, featured an article entitled, "Obama appoints former Ireland negotiator as America's top envoy." The article, referring to remarks by Mitchell, states that the envoy, "does not underestimate the difficulty of this assignment," acknowledging the "danger" of getting involved in the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. Another Palestinian online service, the Palestine News Network (PNN), carried a Reuters report featuring a biography of Mitchell on its homepage.

WALLES